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The lack of administrative power causes concern today when the outstanding issues in higher education are concerned with questions of student, faculty or other kinds of power. The position that leadership takes in resolving these issues determines whether they become more or less explosive. There is no guaranteed formula for solving the complex problems stemming from new campus activism; the route to one solution can aggravate other problems. But an educational leader should not hesitate to act if his judgment dictates that passivity would not lead to eventual achievement of institutional goals. He should be a catalyst in guiding all vital issues at any of their critical stages into constructive channels. (WM)

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Meeting of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, November 11, 1968, Washington, D. C.

CRITICAL ISSUES AND LEADERSHIP

John A. Peoples, Jr.

President Miller, Mr. Nickerson, fellow panelists, and conferees; Believe me, there is nothing symbolic about my being in the position of clean-up man on this panel. It is simply that my talk is more theoretical.

A Consideration of the two concerns of this Panel, "Critical Issues and Leadership," brings forth many questions of antecedence and relationship; namely, how are issues derived? Why and howdo they become critical? What does leadership have to do with critical issues? Do issues become critical for lack of leadership? And importantly, what does leadership do <u>about</u> critical issues? All such questions <u>must</u> be responded to in a discussion of the topic at hand.

Fundamental to any such discussion would seem to be an outlining of some specific critical issues. Very little effort is necessary to do this. Pick up any newspaper, read any magazine, or listen to any television documentary; there is no need to go to professional journals. The issues regarding education today are being barked from every street corner, by people from every arena of endeavor, and through every medium of communication. Therefore, this paper will not attempt to exhaust the list of so-called critical issues. Nor will it attempt to propose solutions to the few that are mentioned. Rather,the rationale here is to suggest a general posture of leadership with respect to any and all issues pertinent to higher education. A few issues will be mentioned briefly for illustration.

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One emergent issue is relevance of the educational experience. Students are demanding that teaching and learning be relevant to their immediate concerns, and not just to those of tomorrow or yesterday. A particular instance is that black students are challenging the proposition that their education must be a carbon copy of that provided for white students, and insisting that content and experience pertinent to their needs and interests be an integral part of the educational package.

Another important issue is determination of valid criteria for instructional competence. We are all too familiar with the trichotomy of research-publication and teaching in which teaching is regarded as a pedestrian assignment to which novice instructors are relegated. Research, on the other hand, is regarded as a high order of endeavor reserved for the annointed, and of course, the reward for research is publication. The researcher and the publisher are considered ipso-facto excellent teachers, while the mere teacher is regarded with disdain if he hasn't published. This heretofore sacrosanct arrangement is now being upset by the new confidence and militancy of those teachers in the lower rungs of the order.

A related issue is faculty compensation. The teaching profession, at all levels, from elementary through university, is coming of age. College teachers, being short in supply, are commanding salaries at unprecedented levels. Surveys to determine prevailing maximums, minimums, and averages, proliferate from various sources, but always with the same general purpose--to justify further increases.

The most prominent issue in higher education today, I think we all will agree, is power: student power in general, black student power in particular, faculty power, and staff power; everything but administration power. Belatedly, however, there has been some concern about the seeming absence of administration power. This impetus for administration power, please note, is coming from outside the establishment rather than from within. The trouble is that every group wants power at the expense of the other groups. There is a constant jockeying for position and superior vantage point.

Our concern here today is with the posture of leadership with respect to critical issues such as those briefly mentioned.

One position leadership might take is to attempt to face each critical issue as it arises. If the issue presents a problem, a solution would be attempted in terms of the specifics of the situation; that is, in terms of the persons involved, particularly the leader, and the nature of the problem. Such a posture would seem to have the advantage of a worry-free administration, giving no thought to tomorrow and caverlierly applying ad hoc techniques to problems ad seriatim. Of course, there may be some serious disadvantages. In the first place, there is not guarantee that critical issues will arise serially. As a matter of fact, they usually arise en masse. As the saying goes, "When it rains, it pours." Moreover, problems associated with critical issues do not lend themselves to simultaneous or even seriatim solutions. Therefore, it might not be wise to be an administrator of emergencies.

Another position, then, might be taken by leadership with respect to critical issues. An effort might be made to catalog all of the possible issues and their concomitant problems. Then, leadership would set about deriving solutions to

these problems, and finally codifying them into a manual of operations. This manual would be used in trouble shooting the organization. With such a manual, the leader, presumably, would simply (first) identify the problem in terms of the coded alphabetized manual; (second) turn to the appropriate page; and (third) read off the solution. (fourth) apply the solution; and (fifth), sit back and watch with satisfaction the results.

Of course, there may be a few minor complications. The solution chosen might not fit the problem. Moreover, there is no guarantee that any solution in the manual will fit any particular problem. For problems have the peculiar property of not adapting themselves to canned solutions. The kinds of problems stemming from the critical issues on today's scene are anything but simple. They are complex to a multitude of dimensions. They involve innumerable combinations and permutations of the problems which were once considered finite and subject to be cataloged. Therefore it might not be wise to be a cookbook administrator.

Still another position might be taken by leadership with respect to problems stemming from critical issues. Let us consider the possibility that an issue which is critical need <u>not</u> constitute a problem. A state of criticalness might be desirable for certain issues, while on the other hand a moderate issue or even a dead issue, under some circumstances, might be considered a problem. A situation might <u>become</u> critical for reasons eminating from varying sources. But the most important source would seem to be that of leadership itself. Indeed, leadership which fails to act, or which does act, either with skill or ineptitude, might bring an issue to a critical stage as well as cause it to become quiescent.

Thus, leadership should have no fear or apprehension about critical issues as such. The role of the leader is not to solve the mutually perceived problems of those under his leadership. The solution of such problems might indeed involve the resolution of a critical issue. But the route to a solution might cause many other issues to become critical. Thus, a leader should not hesitate to raise issues and pursue them to their critical points when such action is toward the achievement of the goals of the organization. Accordingly, an educational leader, say a college or university president, could not afford to be passive with respect to any of the issues previously mentioned. He should be expected at some point to raise the issue of educational relevance, even if the students never thought of it. He is obligated to raise the issue of instructional competence as well as to resolve it. He would certainly be wise to be a perpetrator of the issue of adequate faculty remuneration, or he will not for long have anyone to lead. A president would thus do well to be an instigator, a catalyst, so to speak, with respect to vital issues at any stage of criticalness. A current concern thus presents itself: What is the president's role vis-a-vis the recent student quest for power. It goes without saying that if we are to follow the rationale suggested here to its logical conclusion, he must play a salient role. There is little doubt that he will, whether he wants to or not. He might be an activist in opppsition to the acts of others which may bring about quiescence; or his activists opposition may result in a more explosive problem; on the other hand, he may be an actor and seek to utilize student desire for power by guiding it into constructive channels. This may also bring about quiescence, or a more explosive problem. But there is a

difference. In the former situation, the president is in a purely negative posture which limits his options. His communication channels are formal and of one dimension. In the latter situation, however, he has every opportunity to put his leadership ability to work. He has access to several routes of communication, formal and informal. He can influence the derivation of objectives. He can influence the determination of methods for realization of objectives. We can condition the implementation of the methods chosen. He can with more accuracy, evaluate the results of any actions taken in the organization.

In this sense, student potency need not mean administrative impotency or vice versa. Rather, there would seem to be a greater possibility and probability that student power, along with administrative and faculty power, would be complementary, resulting in greater power for all.

This paper thus sets forth the proposition that leadership and critical issues are related in terms of the action of the leader. It is not what he <u>is</u>, but what he <u>does</u> that raises issues. Further, it is the action he takes that <u>makes</u> or <u>lets</u> them become critical. And finally, it is only through active leadership that issues can be resolved to the benefit of the institution and its various publics.